

4th SUNDAY after EPIPHANY

January 30, 2022

COLLECT: ALMIGHTY AND EVERLASTING GOD, you govern all things both in heaven and on earth: Mercifully hear the supplications of your people, and in our time grant us your peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

THE LESSONS: First Reading: Jeremiah 1:4-10

Psalm: 7:1-6

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Gospel: Luke: 1:21-30

THE SERMON: Has anyone said to you lately, “I love you?” Well, what is love? Today’s epistle 1 Corinthians tells you what love is and what it is not.

You will hear this scripture often as part of a wedding ceremony. Our Book of Common Prayer lists it as a suggested scripture for a wedding.

My favorite line from this scripture states, Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. This scripture also says that without love, we have nothing. If we speak our words are empty, just noise and have the same effect as a clanging cymbal.

In our lives we have three things: Faith, hope, and love. Of these three love is the greatest. It is supposed to never end.

When I preside at a wedding, my gift to the bride and groom is a smooth rock and a large rubber band.

The rubber band symbolizes the give and take that is part of a marriage. In any relationship there can be some problems, some arguments, some disagreements and some power struggles. In order for a relationship to work one can't just plant their feet and refuse to move from that position. Instead, one must recognize that he or she must compromise, give in or give up something. If one refuses to recognize that at some point he or she must give while at the same time allowing the other to take, it is like stretching the rubber band to its breaking point.

Sometimes one has to give more, in a relationship, and there are times one will take more. If one can compromise or be as flexible as this rubber band the relationship will flourish. If not the relationship, like this rubber band stretched to its end, will break. The objective is not to break the rubber band, or cause the relationship to fail, but to keep it intact.

How does one do that? We must master the give and take of a relationship.

If we are able to resolve the issues without insisting on being right all the time and recognize that the other person could be right, then our relationship will be as hard and strong as this smooth rock.

The rock symbolizes endurance. At the beginning of its life the rock may have been part of a large boulder. At some point it broke off and over time sand or water reduced its size and smoothed the jagged points it may have had. And so it is with relationships, if we overcome the rough spots and master the give and take, then the relationship will not only last but be strong and flourish.

God has spoken and shown his love for us by sending his son, Jesus, to teach us how to live and treat each other. Jesus though had some rough spots in his life.

In today's Gospel, Jesus had read from the scripture Isaiah chapter 61 and had begun to speak or explain it. As he talked, the people were amazed at his knowledge and the way he delivered the talk. They found it hard to believe that this was Jesus, the son of Joseph the carpenter. He had lived and grown up with them in the town of Nazaeth. Now he is back and he is a learned rabbi.

They have heard of the healing and things he had done at Capernaum and they wanted him to do the same things there in Nazareth. Jesus knows that it is difficult for a prophet to be accepted in his own town or country because he will say or do something that the people will find hard to accept, especially if he began to point out where they were doing wrongs.

The people wanted Jesus to stay in Nazareth, but Jesus wanted to move on to other areas and also go to Gentiles, people who weren't Jews. As a way to justify his want to deal with Gentiles, Jesus told them two stories where God had his prophets intervene with Gentiles.

Jesus told them the story of the time when there was a drought and famine in Israel for three years in Israel and God had sent Elijah to Zarephath. There he met a widow who was looking for sticks to make a fire to bake some bread with the last bit of oil and meal. She thought that would be her last food to eat. After that, she thought she and her son would starve to death. Elijah had asked her to give him some water and to share her meager amount of food with him. She did and God provided enough food for her to feed, not only herself and son, but her extended family until the drought was over. This widow Jesus told the crowd had been a Gentile.

He also told them the prophet Elisha had encountered many lepers in Israel but he was only able to clean was Naaman, a Syrian military commander who was a Gentile.

This enraged the people because Jews didn't interact with Gentiles. Here this Jewish rabbi was willing to share words and acts of God's salvation and mercy with Gentiles. The people rejected this teaching and drove Jesus out of town. They led him to the edge of the mountain and wanted to throw him off the mountain to his death. However, God allowed Jesus to escape from them.

I ask you where is the love here? Jesus is rejected because he wanted to be inclusive. The prophets Elijah and Elisha showed God's love in their treatment of Gentiles. Jesus had used their stories that throughout time God had compassion and love for all people, Jew and Gentile. The people at Nazareth rejected the love of Jesus and tried to kill him.

If we look back to the description of my gift of the rock and rubber band to marrying couples, the people of Nazareth stretched the rubber band to its breaking point. It snapped. Love here was neither patient nor enduring.

Let us be better people, the very fact that we are able to sit here in church while COVID is interrupting our lives is only because of God's love for us. He has allowed the creation of the vaccine for treatment and protocols that allow us to move about instead of being in lock down.

Do you remember this song that you probably learned as a child just beginning to talk and go to church: **Jesus loves me this I know for the bible tells me so?** Amen

Rev. Lionel Starke